

One year ago, we along the Gulf Coast faced one of our toughest challenges. The most devastating environmental disaster in American history washed over our sugar white shoreline, fouling the beauty of our beaches and tarnishing our reputation as an unspoiled coastal playground. On a regional scale, our whole economy was dealt a massive blow. Even our world-famous seafood took major hits as our waters were closed to fishing and our shrimp, oysters, red snapper and a host of other Gulf culinary delights were shunned.

But all storms pass, and twelve months after the explosion of the BP-Deepwater Horizon, Alabama's seacoast is once again open for business. Our seafood is better than ever and our beaches are in pristine condition. If the hard work of Alabama's post oil spill tourism campaign is successful, summer sun seekers will be back, concerned more with tanning oil than spilled petroleum.

While we all should be optimistic about the prospects of putting the nightmare of 2010 behind us, the progress made towards the clean-up is a hollow victory for thousands of local businesses, which were dealt crippling blows during a tourism season that never materialized. Whole communities are still reeling from business losses while the presidentially-appointed administrator of the BP claims fund slow-walks approval of claims payments.

Louisiana suffered most of the environmental damage from the April 20, 2010 spill, but Baldwin and Mobile counties were arguably economic ground zero. It has been reported that as many as one million tourists bypassed Coastal Alabama in the wake of this man-made storm, taking their valuable tourist dollars elsewhere. For a region that generates up to one third of the state's annual tourist dollars, the oil spill's scuttling of Southwest Alabama's 2010 tourism season is no doubt also contributing to this year's budget shortfall in Montgomery.

Last June, fresh from a visit to Theodore, Fort Morgan and Orange Beach, President Obama promised to get the region back on its feet. He pledged the creation of a claims fund from which damages would be paid. "This \$20 billion [fund] will provide substantial assurance that the claims people and businesses have will be honored. It's also important to emphasize this is not a cap. The people of the Gulf have my commitment that BP will meet its obligations to them."

To date, the GCCF has only paid approximately \$3.8 billion out of a total \$20 billion fund. Only 233 out of a total of 6,912 full and interim business claims have been paid by the Gulf Coast

Claims Facility, overseen by presidentially-appointed administrator, Ken Feinberg. For individuals seeking damage payments, only 1,007 out of 10,813 full claims have been paid, while Mr. Feinberg has paid just 403 of 7,037 interim claims.

Mr. Feinberg dismisses accusations that his claims system is a failure. However, since he refuses to open up his claims payment process for review, he is able to operate with impunity. For this reason, I am calling for an independent audit of the GCCF and its claims process.

Our communities were promised restitution for damages from the BP oil spill and we will continue to hold the government, BP and Mr. Feinberg accountable.

House Passes \$38.5 Billion in Spending Cuts:

History was made in Washington last week as the House passed record-setting federal spending cuts. More importantly, these cuts - combined with a new budget blueprint also passed by the House – dramatically change the direction of federal spending.

While it's true that the amount of cuts passed last week - \$38.5 billion - is the largest non-defense federal spending reduction in U.S. history, the really big news is we've put an end to overall annual federal spending increases. The trend of year-after-year increased federal spending – something Washington simply took for granted for as long as any of us can remember – has been halted under the Republican budget plan.

We all realize that our nation's spending addiction has led to a \$14.2 trillion debt crisis that will take decades to dig out of. As with any addiction recovery, the first step is to acknowledge the problem and stop doing it. House Republicans paved a path to recovery that involves more significant cuts and long-term reform.

Also last week, President Obama seemed to finally bow to pressure to reduce spending, but his actions don't match his rhetoric. I'll comment next week in more detail about the Republican budget plan and the president's response.

The work of conservatives in Congress to end government overspending and move us toward a balance budget is only beginning.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.